

# POULTRY

## ANTIQUITY OF THE TURKEY.

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Written for the Deseret Farmer.

Every poultry raiser is more or less familiar with the greatest of all gallinaceous birds—America's best contribution to the poultry yard—the turkey, and doubtless too, not many are aware of the origin of the present known species and varieties. The name given to America's greatest game bird is very misleading. The first account we have of the bird is by Hernando Cortez, who took with him on his return to Spain from one of his expeditions to the New World, a number of them and thus they were first introduced to Europe. There the curiosities and products that he brought back were handled by Jewish merchants, who for want of a better

name, applied to the birds the Hebrew name "tukki," meaning a peacock. When the birds were first shipped to England about 1541, the Hebrew name followed and was corrupted by the English speaking people into "turkey." While the species carried by Cortez to Spain was undoubtedly the *Meleagris mexicana*—the original specie—indigenous to Central America and what is now the Southwestern States and Mexico, yet the similarity of the birds led the first settlers of the Atlantic seaboard more than a hundred years later to apply the name turkey to the species found in eastern America. When the Pilgrim Fathers landed upon the shores of New England they found indigenous to the forests the wild turkey, (*Meleagris gallopavo*) common to the Mississippi Valley and the Eastern States, from which species the seven varieties of

the domestic turkey, namely the Bronze, Narragansett, Buff, Slate, White, Black and the Bourbon Red have been bred and developed by artificial crossing and intelligent selection.

One other species of turkey, (*Meleagris ocellata*) is indigenous to the peninsula of Yucatan and to Honduras, but this species and the *M. gallopavo* are doubtless remote variations of *M. mexicana*, which are known by students or archaeology to have been indigenous to the Pacific Coast country, and particularly to that section embraced by the states of Utah, Colorado, Arizona and New Mexico.

In this vast region, particularly along the Kanab Wash, the Escalante and San Juan Rivers in Utah, the Mancos and Colorado Rivers, the Gila and Rio Grande and tributaries dwelt a dense population in an advanced state of civilization when the progenitors of European nations were but half clad in the skins of wild beasts and dwelt in caves. High up in the cliffs in the canyons along these streams are the remains of thousands of the rock dwellings and palaces and temples of this ancient race of Americans who are known to modern times as the Cliff Dwellers. Implements of war and of industry found in these ancient dwellings indicate great antiquity and that the people belonged to the stone age and even prior to that and that these great canyons and adjoining mesas were inhabited for countless ages by a people very superior to the Indian tribes found here by Europeans. In the ancient ditches, almost obliterated by erosion, we learn of the most ancient system of irrigation known to man, of the fields of corn and beans and squash thus cultivated when the great cities of London and Paris were unknown. In the floors and store-rooms of these ancient rock dwellings are found whole ears of corn and the beans and seeds of the squash and pumpkins they cultivated. Under the debris of fallen walls and inner earth heaps along with the implements of war and chase, the tools for building, household utensils, and clothing and ornaments are found the implements used for the manufacture of domestic articles such as awls of turkey bone and turkey bone needles. These awls and needles were used in the preparation of rush matting and baskets platted with a harness of yucca rope

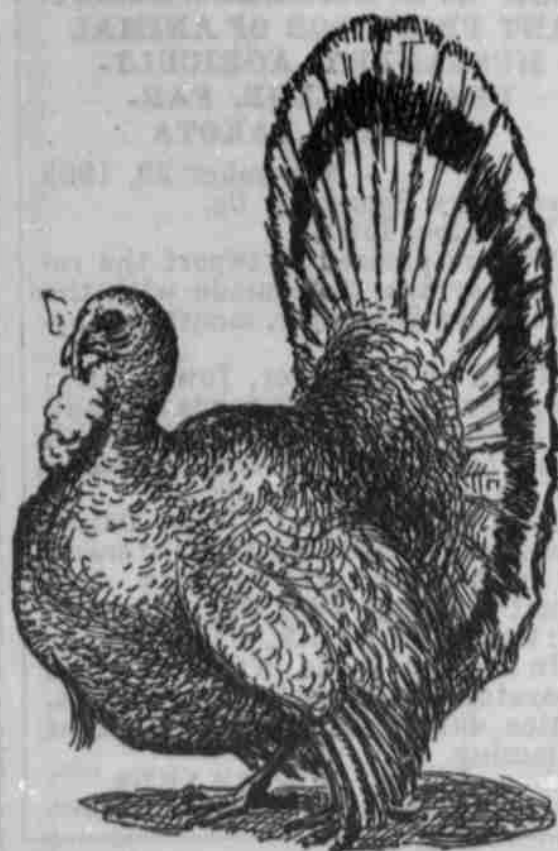
and hide and in making sandals of yucca and feather cloth from turkey feathers and yucca fibre with which to cover their dead. In this mute story of the dead past we read of the domestication and utilization of the turkey which prehistoric man appropriated on the western continent just as prehistoric man tamed and domesticated the wild birds and animals and plants of the so called old world in countless ages before the old world was new, and there is every evidence to indicate that this ancient race of men may have been—indeed, must have been wiped from the face of the earth in the twinkling of an eye by some great catastrophe, possibly such as occurred in the year 1902 when two thirds of the entire population of the Island of Martinique were asphyxiated by the terrible eruption of Mont Pelee. Gone in the shadows of the past is this greatest race of the paleolithic age and but for the mute story left behind entombed beneath the solid rock in the dizzy heights of those mighty canyons, the great antiquity of the progenitors of America's greatest game bird might never have been known. That the turkey was domesticated by this ancient race there can be no doubt, for there is much evidence to indicate that their bones were in common use for countless ages as awls and needles in the manufacture of almost all domestic articles, clothing and ornaments and particularly in the manufacture of feather cloth which was made by splitting off the downy part of feathers and wrapping the thin layer of quill around a yucca string, thus forming a feather cord as large as a finger and these were interlaced and tied together forming a mantle or shroud in which their dead were wrapped. From the extensive use of bones and feathers, we are led to believe that the turkey was reared in great numbers in domestication, for with the primitive weapons at command in that age, it would not have been possible to bring down the wild birds in sufficient numbers even by the most expert hunters to supply the demand, although there might have been a sufficient number of them, which is not at all likely. In summary, then, we can only conclude that the domestication of the turkey far outdates modern civilization, and by the laws of evolution and variation, the different species as now known were



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